

Testimony of  
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United States Department of Agriculture

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the history of the activities that USDA has conducted for Mormon crickets and other grasshoppers in the Great Basin, and our efforts to combat current and future grasshopper and Mormon cricket outbreaks in this area.

Accompanying me today is Chris Pyron, Deputy Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service.

We are fully aware that grasshoppers and Mormon crickets have caused widespread devastation throughout the Great Basin. In Utah alone, Mormon crickets and grasshoppers have infested more than 1.5 million acres and an estimated \$25 million in crop damage may occur. In fact, Mormon crickets can feed on more than 400 species of plants, and a single Mormon cricket can consume an amount of rangeland forage equal to 38 pounds dry weight per acre.

Throughout the western United States, there is excellent cooperation between USDA, other

Federal agencies, State agencies, local governments, and private landowners in combating Mormon cricket and grasshopper outbreaks. This year, although stressed financial resources have been used to their fullest extent, not enough was done to prevent the current situation. The ominous fact is that each female Mormon cricket this year can lay about 86 eggs in the ground, and, if natural conditions favor the hatch of these eggs next spring when treatment would be most effective, the Mormon cricket outbreaks in 2002 could be even more widespread, severe, and destructive.

During the mid-1980's, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) took a lead role in monitoring and suppressing grasshoppers and Mormon crickets. In 1986, Congress, in response to destructive grasshopper outbreaks, appropriated \$18 million to APHIS for a grasshopper suppression program. In addition, Congress created no-year funding for continued grasshopper suppression programs by stipulating that \$16 million remain available until expended. This funding mechanism provided APHIS with immediate access to resources for suppressing economically significant grasshopper populations. From 1987-1992, Congress appropriated \$5 million annually for the no-year grasshopper reserve fund.

As the lead Federal agency, APHIS conducted population surveys, implemented cooperative programs with States and other cooperating organizations, prepared cost-share agreements and escrow accounts, recruited and trained specialized and seasonal staff, and obtained sufficient equipment and materials, such as vehicles, pesticides, and pesticide storage facilities. In addition, APHIS provided the essential environmental documentation for the suppression program.

In 1990, APHIS received an emergency supplemental appropriation of \$6.8 million to cooperate with States and individuals to suppress grasshoppers on Conservation Reserve Program and other lands. The grasshopper populations during this time were kept under control, so the no-year grasshopper reserve exceeded \$16.5 million in 1993.

Beginning in 1994 and continuing through the present, Congressional appropriations for the grasshopper and Mormon cricket program have ceased. APHIS was directed by the Office of Management and Budget to fund all grasshopper related activities, including survey and suppression, from the accumulated no-year reserve. APHIS followed that directive and exhausted the no-year funding during fiscal year (FY) 1999.

In an attempt to prioritize the use of funds, APHIS has conducted only crop protection activities since 1995. The goal of crop protection programs is to protect high-value crops by treating strips of Federal range lands where these lands border the crop. Such programs provide short-term, immediate suppression of grasshopper populations migrating from Federal lands onto cropland. Crop protection programs do not include any long-term rangeland management. However, since 1999, only the APHIS contingency fund, which must also cover emergencies for the other program areas of APHIS, has been made available to cover grasshopper and Mormon cricket suppression.

For example, in FY 2000, the Agency, using APHIS' contingency funds, prepared to conduct traditional surveys and earmarked funds for grasshopper and Mormon cricket suppression programs. However, the populations were not as high as projected and most of the suppression

dollars were returned to APHIS' contingency fund at the end of the fiscal year.

In FY 2001, APHIS has taken \$300,000 from the contingency fund to carry out grasshopper and Mormon cricket surveys and other program planning activities. However, it is likely that because of other high priority needs, no additional APHIS money will be available for grasshopper and Mormon cricket suppression. Accordingly, funding for suppression on public lands will require resources from the responsible Federal land management agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

If APHIS is to be a consistent and viable partner in cooperative grasshopper and Mormon cricket programs, the Agency must have sufficient baseline funding to maintain a domestic infrastructure capable of managing these suppression programs. This includes funding to recruit line personnel, provide training, revise cooperative agreements, and prepare relevant environmental documentation for future programs. Successful implementation of future programs requires early consistent funding and conformance with environmental laws.

Nevertheless, APHIS is currently preparing for future grasshopper and Mormon cricket outbreaks, should funding become available. Specifically, APHIS is writing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the draft of which is due out later this summer, that addresses the environmental effects of APHIS' rangeland grasshopper and Mormon cricket suppression programs. In addition to the EIS, APHIS will also consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure full compliance with the Endangered Species Act.